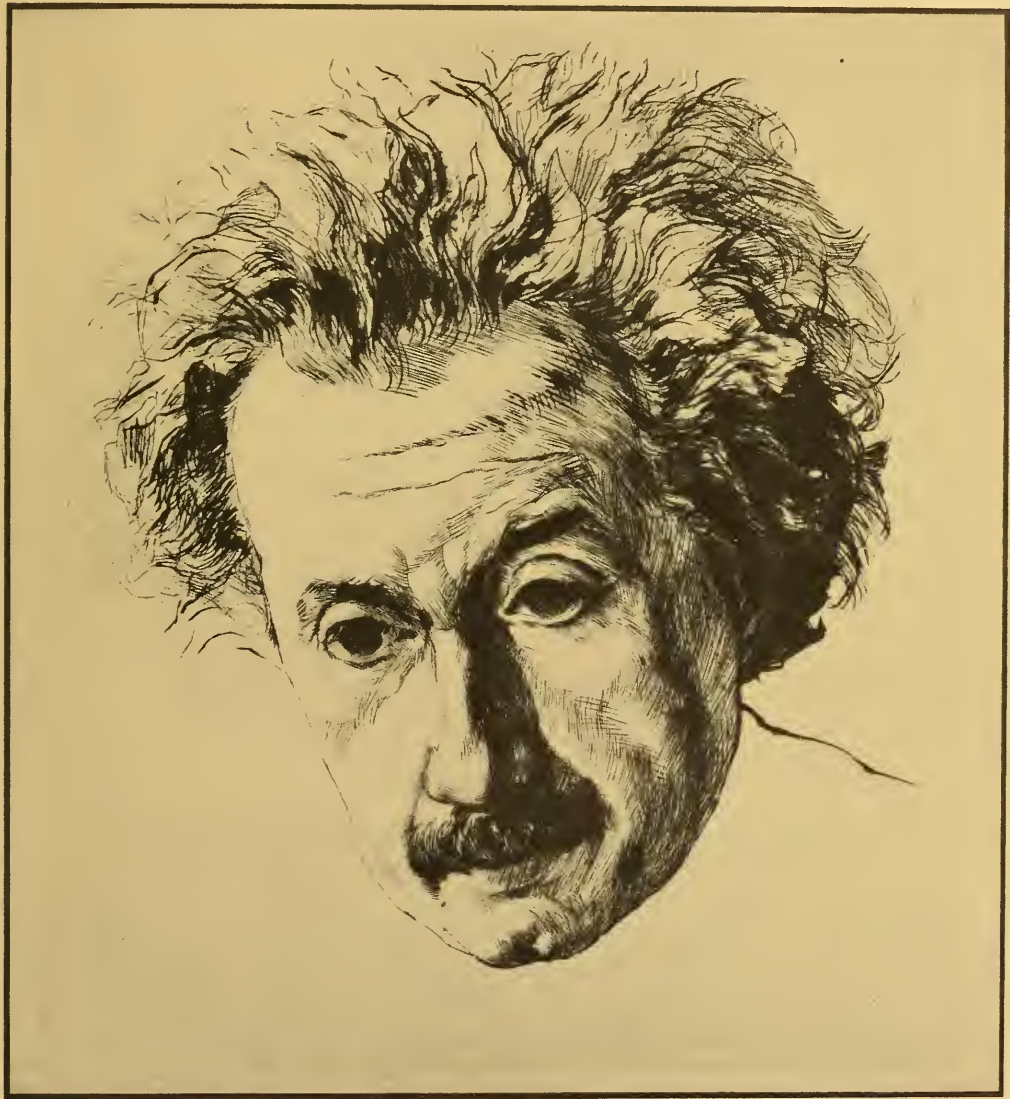




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AUTUMN, 1979  
ONE DOLLAR

*Four*  
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*Quarters*





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# Four Quarters

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# On Bringing Andrew Marvell Outside

MARYANN MENDOZA

November snatched a breath of sun  
And wrapped in it a day. We took  
It as our private gift, which none  
Refused to claim. Dissolving from

The concrete blocks, we fumbled in  
The foreign air, then crushed the grass  
With books and bones, and made a rim  
Within. "Okay." Our teacher's eyes

Went 'round, and then: "Let's open to  
His Mistress poem, the one about  
Not wasting time." A sparrow flew  
Into a tree and spread his song

From there. The wind began to tease  
The pages. We invaded him  
As boldly as the lover's plea,  
The sun's embrace, although they all

Seemed to invite us. PHYSICAL  
WILL TURN TO UGLY prints itself  
Beside the poem. I catch the fall  
Of two red leaves. The poet spoke,

Of course, of people. "Life will end—  
Enjoy it now," our teacher sang.  
I turned my head. The building sent  
Its bell outside, and then the noise

Of students. Legs uncrossed and eased  
To life, but some refused to move,  
To leave the afternoon they seized.  
The hidden birds all threw their songs.

The sun still warmed the grass. We strolled  
Away with packed-up poems. The day,  
Perhaps, was a cliché. I stole  
A glance and then went home, alone.

# Allhallows Eve

PRESTON FILBERT

**I**N THE CENTER OF THE TABLE I had put the bowl of candy that he conceded to the children—peanut butter kisses in black and orange wax paper and kernels of sugar-corn like extracted teeth. The bowl had been my idea a few years ago, when the children had first realized that their friends were getting something that they were not allowed, and we had spent the next few Halloweens sitting quietly in the dark living room, listening to the neighbors' children passing our house: they probably thought we were in bed or gone away to avoid the trouble, never suspected that we all sat in a circle around the room seeing only the dim glow of each other's clothes and listening to each other smack and pop our lips and tongues around the slippery candy, while his face was lit with the regular drawing of his pipe, like a pulse burning out the time. He always outlasted the children and me and even usually the children in the street, waiting for the world to recover and to usher it safely back to God.

But tonight the bowl sat untouched and the children ran their forks through their potatoes without lifting them to their mouths, and occasionally but only momentarily they let their eyes glance toward the windows. It was darkening and already we could hear the laughter and the shouts. I looked toward him with their same reticence but saw even more quickly the growing bow along his lips that curved around the knotted root of his pipe and faded with the light into the bright but encircled anger of his tobacco fire. I looked at the candy bowl, aware that I was the only one who did, and noticed a hairline curving down from the brim; I could not tell if it was a hair or a crack. He watched my hand reach out, and I only lightly brushed the outside of the bowl. "It's cracked," I said. The children had watched my hand too and they were now looking at me, their three faces turned together at the same angle like cast saints along a store rack, each of them asking for the same emotion and terrible in their empathy.

Again reaching out, I pushed the bowl toward them. They looked down into their potatoes, disappointed.



"There," he said, "That's not enough anymore. It's a maxim: 'The given inch begins the mile.' They want to go out now. With the MacKenzies. Your old cracked bowl isn't enough."

The children put their napkins on the table with a remarkable simultaneous movement. "We're going to bed now," the oldest said and pushed himself away from the table. His brothers followed him out of the room, wise enough to not look back at their father's eyes marking the sympathy of their backs and gait. When they were gone he looked at me and smiled before he lit his pipe.

When he had taken his place in the easy chair he did not recline it, but sat upright, as if he were a trusted watcher in God's open palm. I started toward the bedroom but turned at the hallway to look back: in this (and other things) I fail even my children. In his chair, beside the window but angled away as if to show his rejection of everything it opened on, he allowed the thin smoke to turn in slow somersaults above his head before it slipped into the blue-white light that shot into the room from the mercury lamp on the street corner. He made that light a part of his contempt, for it exposed the vanity beneath it—the children on the curb.

I could see them in their costumes with glitter and their pumpkin-headed flashlights which do not give light so much as they make the movement of sparkle and dark into something real and cheap on the end of a battery stick. If my children had been out they'd have had real jack-o-lanterns on poles, like I used to see in books and always wanted when I was young, when my mother gave me a pumpkin to carve out on the stoop. They don't have stoops here in Missouri—they have porches. I used to have to explain that word when I used it here—not because people did not understand me, but because they wanted an apology for words like "stoop," "frappe" and the way I pronounced "water." Now they do not hear or care. But they are not stupid. That is the thing. Back East he'd have gone to college, he might have been a liberal and a member of the book club. Here in Coleman the Bible is the one book everybody has, sitting on the coffee table and dirty on its edges, like Mother's copy of *The Warren Report* with the coffee ring on the cover. Here you'd never see a ring upon the Bible, though such things must occur. Perhaps every family has a Bible on the closet shelf, dirty in the improper way. But the family book remains—the King James we read in English Lit, with the lovely cadence of Christ and the sometimes beautiful despair of the patriarchs—palm polished leather and frayed corners, catching the terrible light from the corner.

But that is not enough for him because he will not be stupid, not even with the innocent stupidity of his neighbors. He has his other books, his other modern Bible, ink-lined like a student's text,

and his cheap blue-bound pocket dissertations on the Biblical allegories and the growing liberal threat to Christianity, and every week his magazine comes with bright pictures of helicopters like locusts spitting fire on a field, with starving children who stare into the camera to prove the prophecy of famine; I lay them face down on his desk and he turns them over grimly, nodding at the picture when he sees it and, marking with balanced asterisks inside, the further confirmations of his knowledge—the identity of Gog and Magog, the masks of the false prophets. And he sets himself against them—like these patriarchs, but believing too in the old America, the hard simple body of believing that tightens its belt before the siege and sacrifices to spread the warning. So he tithes beyond the meaning of the word, bolsters the economy of God against the foreign interests, but still prepares himself for the final “nothing left” that he believes in.

**I** FELT TIRED THEN, thinking about his cold prophetic patience that lasted longer than any hope I had once had in changing him, before I learned what little love can do. I turned again down the hall, but then I heard bed springs in the children’s room, grinding slowly up from rising weight. I stopped and heard the heavy shudder of wood rubbing wood as the window was raised. The thought that they were about to escape, to slide out the little square of light into the evening—through the window that he, my husband, had measured and probably framed himself, as level and perpendicular as the house itself—thrilled me, and I made myself an instant accomplice, as though I had deliberately positioned myself in the hallway to buffer the sound from their room to his ears. I wanted to speak, to cover their movements, but I was afraid that breaking the silence would attune his ears away from whatever divine mumble he heard and return them to the dirty earth where his children sneaked beneath his accuser’s senses.

From their room I heard whispers. The oldest said he’d return in half an hour. He told them to leave the window open and stay quiet.

I watched the picture window behind my husband’s back. Several figures hurried just along the edge of the street light, and I recognized the jacket of my oldest as he turned on the light’s periphery and looked back at our home. He was wearing a mask, red and hugely nosed, garishly highlighted by the shadows thrown from the lamp. Perhaps he was cackling, perhaps shuddering at his audacity, but the mask twitched on his face like the features of a legitimate demon. Then he turned and vanished from the circle.

I wanted to cackle myself. I felt a terrible giggle rising in my

throat and I turned quickly from the hallway with my hand muffling my mouth. I was biting my fingers. The door to the children's room was next to me and I slid inside and eased myself against the wall, uncovering my mouth and letting out a quickly swallowed gasp as I let myself slide down into a squatting position. Moonlight was coming in the open window, pushing a breeze ahead of it which slid beneath the short sheers like a breath behind a tissue. The peacefulness made me smile, and I settled back against the wall as comfortably as I could. My ankles ached a little, but I soon forgot them with watching. Nothing stirred and I watched, with the same sort of rapt attention that you sometimes see when you walk by a house at night and look in a window at the face of a woman watching a television you cannot see: she looks like a somnambulist, with a concentration unnatural and disturbing, and in the screen's blue light she seems to stare out at you like the dead in a horror show. I sat like that, thinking that, while I watched the silence of my children.

When I had entered there had been a movement, but since then they had not so much as shifted a finger under the blankets. Their light breath remained, they could not hold that, but they made it part of the room and as much a sound of the breeze in the curtains as a part of their stiff bodies beneath their quilts. They did not look like corpses on a table, though I thought they should: they did not seem to have ever lived, and I doubted even the pain connected with them, that had made them real at other times, when I had stopped in the middle of the kitchen and looked around me into something like the quality of a dangerous pleasant dream, that seemed to penetrate to the heart of things because all things in the dream were floating and intangible, like the memory of the dream itself and the feeling it recalled. My children were an anchor then, and I paddled on the surface of the water far above their heads, connected by a cord.

I do not know how long I wondered. I heard a rustle outside the house and then I saw a marvelous thing: through the open window, like meteors in a stream, candy came shooting up and out and rained upon the beds. The cellophane wrappers caught light and crackled, almost small fires, and popped and tumbled upon the chests of my children. But they still would not move, though their breathing had become watchful; I knew they would not move till I was gone—not to scoop up the candy, not even to brush aside the tickling touch of a wrapper against the cheek.

Outside the window the oldest called their names. "Are you there or not?" he hissed, and suddenly his arm shot over the sill and he pulled himself into the frame. He did not have his mask on, and he looked straight into my face, wide-eyed while I stepped for-



ward. "Mom!" He said it very loudly. I wanted to reassure him, to help him in and to embrace him, but before I came closer I saw his mask rise behind him and a large hand grasp his shoulder. He squealed and I screamed, just before I saw his father tear the mask off of his face and laugh triumphantly. He pulled the boy off the sill.

**I** RAN OUT THE HALL and across the front room to the door. I knew that he had been waiting for the boy to return, waiting maybe in a bush, exulting, possibly only with difficulty repressing a giggle of expectation, and with enough humor anyway to snatch up the discarded mask and put it on before he caught the boy. Then I imagined him instead not knowing all along but suddenly illumined by God and transported in a second beneath the window, devil-masked to boot, like a sin returned to claim the sinner. This is what he would want to believe. And maybe there was this supernal aid, for when I turned on the light and opened the door he was already there with the boy in front of him and a large grocery bag in his hand. Already the little pleasure he allowed himself—the almost boyish impulse to laugh—had flushed back into his skin and left him grim and nearly sorry. The boy only stumbled a few unyielding steps when he was shoved from behind. His father threw the grocery bag after him and it broke like a pinata against the boy's back. The candy spun gaudily across the living room floor. He kicked the bag and sent a swarm buzzing into the hall where the younger children watched without cringing. From the dining room table he swept the bowl onto the floor: the candies scattered but the bowl did not break. Then he just stopped; he smiled down at the rolling bowl and shook his head.

"There," he said, with his hand open and pointing to the bowl, "It didn't even break. Don't you think that's significant? It shows how much my authority means around here." The boy looked at the bowl darkly. His father circled behind him, pleased that his son's eyes did not follow him, that he did not flinch. When he kicked the boy I grabbed him. He pushed me into the couch and yelled back at our son, telling him to get to his room. The boy stumbled along the wall he had fallen against, looking wildly at me begging him to stay. When he disappeared into his room I screamed and jumped at my husband again. He caught me and threw me back into the couch.

"What do you want?" he said. I sat up in the couch, crying now. I didn't understand him. "Do you want to be like the MacKenzies? Is that what you want your family to be?"

I want them to be happy." I said, "I want them to have things."

"They have what they need. You don't have to worry about

that. I supply them with what they need."

"Then what am I here for?"

"You're their mother."

"I don't know what that means. You never let me do anything."

"You want to do too much." He strode across the room and slapped the light off. I was glad to have the darkness: I sat up and wiped my eyes, refusing to snifle. "Some kids were coming up the walk," he said. He was looking out the little window in the door. "They left when the light went out." I no longer had to snifle, I was breathing easier, but he came back across the room. In the darkness he only obliterated squares of light; then he stepped into the hard glare of the street lamp and looked down at me without anger.

"You want to be like the MacKenzies."

I didn't want that and he knew it, but he liked to catalogue their sins: their too many pets, ill-kempt and always dying, their late and loud parties with shouts and unfunny laughter, their spoiled children. Their exorbitant holidays. He dwelt on their holidays: their Fourth of July, which reeked throughout the neighborhood on the fifth with the dingy smell of gunpowder; their Easters, when they re-lit the Christmas lights they never took off their house; their Halloween, where tonight their windows were sudden with jack-o-lanterns and speakers under the porch rasped an old "haunted house" record. And Christmas. So big that they told their children Santa Claus had to come to their house twice a year; at the beginning of the month the children would wake to find already more presents under the tree than other families would ever have, only to be told that they had to wait to open them, because more were coming on Christmas Eve—so much more that their living room becomes only a room for presents and the tree in the corner is only a rugged mast on a sea of colored paper and flowery bows.

He turned now, back into the shadow and talking to whomever heard. "Sometimes," he said, "I go up there to their house and just wonder. At night. I was there last Christmas Eve. And for the first time I doubted. I wondered if maybe I shouldn't go along for your sake and the boys'. It would be easy. I counted the Christmas lights along the eaves. There weren't so many that we couldn't afford them. The tree inside wasn't that big. But then—what was it? Maybe two A.M. The lights—the room lights—came on upstairs and then downstairs. They were awake already. Or probably never asleep. Only waiting a certain acceptable time and already not able to hold off any longer. It takes hold of them that much."

He had come back out of the darkness, looking down at me again. "But wait till springtime." He crouched on the other side of

the coffee table and looked directly at me. "You don't know this and I wasn't going to tell you. But maybe I should. You can learn something. Last spring I caught Bob MacKenzie and his oldest boy, at three o'clock—A.M. again—filling old milk cartons," he said slowly, as if I needed time to believe the horror he felt in his words "out of our garden faucet. Their water was turned off. They were going around the neighborhood stealing water." He paused, but I only watched him. "I was almost sorry I caught him because I thought he'd be ashamed. So I left him alone. But the next day he came over and told me he knew I'd seen him. He winked. Like it was a dirty joke. He said 'It's the ghost of Christmas-just-past. The bills you know. My wife says they come back like Jacob Marley.' He winked again and laughed. So I laughed too. I felt sick inside, wondering what his family thought of him."

There was a movement behind my husband, and I saw the oldest boy standing in the hallway, listening to his father say, "And now I'm wondering again if it's worth it. Maybe you all don't care that we get by. Without cheating or stealing. That when I'm gone you won't inherit my debts and that you'll appreciate what I've done for you. Without at least as much worry as the others will have when things get harder. Without the despair."

Then the boy was stepping into the heavy light. He put his hand on his father's shoulder and said huskily, on the edge of crying, "I'm sorry." His father reached up and covered the boy's hand with his own.

It was black and white—a picture, posed and immemorial, and over its hard shiny surface I could run my fingers, but I would not be able to feel the contours of its forms.

**T**HE YOUNGER CHILDREN had followed the oldest, bearing the candy up-folded in their pajama tops; they poured it onto the floor and then backed away from the little pile they'd made. My husband touched each of them, only lightly, but they pressed themselves against his sides before they let the oldest lead them back to bed. Then my husband turned on the light. I watched him carefully, afraid of him for the first time. He nudged the candy he'd thrown across the floor into the pile the children had made; he stood above it, tapping at it, unable to stay away or to keep from smiling at it.

The doorbell rang. I looked quickly into his face before I remembered I should not. "You'd better get it," he said. I rubbed my eyes again and ran my fingers through my hair: "What should I say?"

"See who it is."

I looked at him this time, deliberately and sadly, and walked

across the room. The bell rang and I opened the door. The children on the steps squealed their greeting and thrust their sacks up and open before their masks and painted faces. "I'm sorry," I said, "We're all out. Really."

"Let's see them," he said.

I stepped beside the door and pulled it open. There were four children, variously incongruously dressed: a pig beside a princess, a skeleton behind a tramp, with their bags lowered now and their faces turned indecisively between our home and the street. I was afraid of what my husband might do, but he only smiled and swept his arm over the pile of candy. "All this. It's for you."

The children looked at me wonderingly and then hurried across the floor to the pile; they dropped beside it and began to scoop the candy into their bags. He stepped back and watched them before he looked up at me with an expression I remembered not from any hatefilled night but from the evening of our wedding, when I had looked down the short aisle into his horrible triumphant eyes, and even as I said "I do"—in his church, before his pastor and in front of more of his eyes than of mine—even then I had known that I was saying no to a lot more than what I was saying yes to.

And this is the terrible thing: I said "Get out!" and I was pushing the children away from the candy, kicking it across the floor and reaching out at them with fingers hooked like a hag's. My husband caught me under the arms and pulled me back, away from the children falling to the door and crying. I struggled until they were gone, and he squeezed me hard against his chest. I felt myself sliding out across the floor but he lifted me; he carried me to the couch and lay me out and brushed the hair off of my face. Then he turned out the light again.

My eyes are slow to adjust and maybe I have slept awhile, though I am still breathing heavily because I have not rested. Objects swim out of the darkness and I can see his shirt the way a ghost glows out of a shadow. He is not smoking and I know he is waiting for something besides the end of night: his special patience has been broken and he is sitting so still to catch God's eye again, to pull it away from the world's rush. But I can see the candy pieces and the bowl, floating on the floor. The candy is mine, to reach out for and to grow sorry for, but the bowl is his: it has the same alabaster halo as God's hand slipping down to support my husband. He waits for me and morning, but I drift down a dark channel, eddying and unoared.



# Night Circus

NANINE VALEN

They hunt in the dump  
Shoveling snouts and turning over in the garbage  
Stinking scraps and yawning cans.  
What night circus spots these bare-faced few  
With its cold light? a spare shaft shot down from the moon  
Along the ridge, across the hole, where a great beast  
(And a cub) walks a tightrope. A startling silhouette  
Arms outstretched and baby proud she balances  
Her half a ton. Below  
In the center ring barefoot bareback riders  
Hug their tumbling mamas carelessly  
Spilling joy from a broken bottle,  
Drunk with play.

At some appointed hour, the dream cars come  
With engines cut, trying to slide their fins  
Over the rubble of the dump parking lot.  
A half dozen at least, frozen,  
Come to stare. Headlights wound  
The creatures' private dark; blinded  
A small black bear claws at the light.  
Oblivious they applaud. Those who hunger  
In this smelly hole, fingering  
Last night's caviar, spaghetti carbonara, jamming  
Sickly faces into tuna cans, rise  
With their prey still glued to their paws.

Then, the cars are gone  
And the ripening moon celebrates  
Those who swill under it in the dark  
And dance.

# Salt And Earth

ARNOLD SABLE

**A**FTER HER HUSBAND WENT to sleep in the morning—he was night watchman for the mattress factory on the other side of the cemetery—she had nothing to do all day. The old man would sleep until late afternoon, and it was as if he was dead. He lay under the covers with only his nose showing. Nothing woke him, not the clomping of horses on the road and the cries of peddlars, not the backfiring of automobiles, and certainly not any movement she made in the house. He slept as he had always slept: a grey, unmoving man who made a lump on the bed and who would eventually awaken and expect his soup and potted meat on the table.

She sat at the window slowly gumming pieces of bread that she dipped in a bowl of coffee on the windowsill. After the bread was gone, she took from the pocket of her old shag coat two lumps of sugar. Not until she had had breakfast, not until the last grain of sugar had melted on her tongue, would she get up to light the coal stove in the kitchen. Even in the middle of winter, in the frozen cold while the air seemed to be suspended outside in a kind of permanent waitfulness and the snow clung in layers to the roof, they never kept the stove on during the night. Her hands were always stiff and red from the cold. They stayed red throughout the year, big splotches punctured with white where the calluses came up through the skin.

When it was raining and the wind slapped water against the window, she sat at the kitchen table. She ate with a methodical, automatic movement of her jaws, staring at the dishes that were piled in layers on the shelves. When she was finished, she brushed the crumbs together and licked them off her hand and rinsed the dishes in the sink.

She did the same thing at this early hour as she did in the old country, coaxing a flicker of light from the stove with steady puffs of breath and fanning the meager spark with a wave of her hands. The flame would jump up at her, and the coal would begin to glow in a sharp light that shone upon her thin, sagging cheeks and

made two red dots in her eyes. Here, she had no problem with fire. The coal stove flared almost immediately, and candles she lit with safety matches from the grocery. By a turn of the knob at the gas range, she could have heat for cooking. Everything was easier here: opening a faucet when they wanted water, keeping food in the ice box. But she still clung to some of her old ways. She lit a candle in the morning because she was used to the flickering light and the shadows on the walls and under the table. The orange light made her kitchen seem real and part of a continuous thread of existence and not a collection of enamelled shapes and linoleum surfaces.

The old man's brother had found the house for them after they came to America. It was a small house, set on a road which curled around out of sight. Across the road was an old barn, and behind that a sparsely planted field, and beyond that a tall iron fence, strong as a line of soldiers in formation, which marked the boundary of the cemetery. The brother said that up the road was a university with many buildings and that they must not be surprised at the number of automobiles which would pass by the house and probably rattle the windows.

The brother gave them a bed and a table and chairs. He said they could buy new ones when they got their footing, but they never did change them, and the old table with its peeling, warped veneer and the big orange bed with pictures of teddy bears and wide-eyed clowns on the headboard remained. She learned how to pack a lunch into a metal box, and how to slide about the house silently on her bare feet while he was sleeping during the day, and how to stir the cooking pots so that the spoon would not scrape against the metal. She learned how to set up the ironing board which fell out of a closet in the wall and how to change from cold water to hot in the bathtub.

After they moved into the house, the brother came no more. He dropped out of their lives as if he had never existed. She did not care. She had everything she needed. They were dependent upon no one. She could slip under the bed covers at night, while the old man was away at the mattress factory, and drift slowly sleepwards as if she was alone in a great field with the mountains all about her; she could almost feel in her nostrils the smell of dried grass and mint and low-hanging leaves.

**I**T WENT ON LIKE THIS for along time, the endless roll of days, the cookie baking and the sitting at the window and watching the road. One day at lunch, after her husband rotated a mouthful of goulash inside his cheeks, he spoke to her. She was

surprised and waited for a while before she showed that she had heard him. He went on chewing his food and speaking.

"We could put him in the other room. There's a bed and you could take your things out of the closet and put them in our room. There's no reason why that room has to go to waste."

He was suggesting that they take in a student from the university as a boarder. She had understood, but the enormity of the project was sinking into her mind like a heavy stone dropped into a pond.

"It would cost us nothing. We should have thought of it sooner. We could get two dollars a week for that room. When it stands empty, it does nothing for us."

Why would she need anyone else under her roof? She was content with her days. How could she remain tranquil with another person, a stranger, loose in the world with a key to the front door?

Her husband talked as if the matter had been settled. After lunch he would walk up to the university and tell them that they had a room ready for a student.

Pieces of soggy beans clung to his moustache, and he spit particles of food on the table as he talked. When he walked away, hobbling to keep the weight off his bad leg, she noticed the curve in the once straight back. He is getting old, she thought. He could never drag heavy tree trunks now.

Two weeks passed. She gradually forgot about the vacant room waiting for a student to fill it.

Then one morning, while he slept in their bedroom with the door closed, the doorbell rang.

Rarely heard, the sound shattered the air and made her stand still with astonishment. What to do now? Who was it? What would the caller want?

The ringing continued.

Her husband flung open the door to the bedroom. His sleep-filled eyes burned on her with fury.

"Well?" he cried. "Well? Why don't you see who it is, you lummoX? Why did you have to wait until it woke me up?"

She moved through the living room as if in a dream. Behind the curtain-covered door stood a dark figure whose face, cupped by hands, bobbed up and down the glass. When the figure saw the shadow of her approach, it sprang backwards and waited motionlessly while she turned the latch.

"You have a room here, a room you want to rent," said the boy immediately. She held the door partly open and peered out at him. "A room," he said. He raised his voice. "I'm from the university."

Under his jacket she saw the shirt clinging to his chest and the tight muscles of his neck. He was tall, taller than her husband. The



wavy yellow hair seemed to have trapped rays of sun on the top of his head. He was smiling at her, a loose, readily expanding smile that made his lower lip start from his chin. The blue eyes gazed boldly into hers. She turned, embarrassed.

"Come."

He followed her into the house. When they reached the living room, her husband, who had been waiting in his underwear, shut the bedroom door with a swift wave of his hand so that only his face was exposed.

"Well?" he said. "Who is it?"

She wished her husband had not been so quick about closing the door. She wanted the boy to see him as he was, a shriveled old man, a mockery of a man with his thin arms sticking out of his body like sticks.

"He has come about the room." She felt she was going to smile.

"Wait," said her husband.

He closed the door. She stared at the point where his face had been framed by the door and the wall. She could feel the boy's eyes roaming over her back, examining the living room, looking, looking, as his clothes rustled and the shoes pressed squeaking sounds into the floor.

Her husband reappeared, hastily adjusting his pants. All signs of sleep were gone from his face. A thread of spit stretched between his lips as he opened his mouth.

"You want to see the room? Come, I show you."

They all trooped together into the little room. From the back, the woman watched the boy's head snap from side to side, up and down, as he quickly surveyed the old brown dresser, the dusky walls, and the small window that overlooked the shed where the refuse barrels were kept. He sat on the bed and then stretched out on it, his long legs making indentations in the quilt.

"Aaah," he said. "This I like. Soft."

They watched him as he wriggled and bounced and patted the mattress with his hands.

"You want?" asked the old man. He had a happy, drunken grin on his face and nodded his head with every motion made by the boy.

"How much?" the boy asked, sitting up suddenly.

"Two dollars," he answered.

The boy strolled over to the window, hands in the pockets of his jacket. They had to move aside to let him pass.

"It's pretty small," he said uncertainly.

They waited. He walked about the room, opening drawers and peering for a long time into the closet.

"And it doesn't have a separate entrance," he said as if to

himself.

"One dollar," the old man said suddenly.

The boy stopped and stared towards the bed. She held her breath, not wanting the sound to interfere with the hushed quiet which filled the room.

The boy shook his head. The yellow locks danced over his ears.

"It's still too small." His face was puckered up into a frown.

"Is a nice room," said the man. "Sunny."

"Nice," she repeated. She could feel the word crack on her tongue.

The old man made something that sounded like a giggle.

"Very cheap. I give it to you for one dollar. You want?"

"Okay," said the boy, laughing. "I want."

They all laughed. It was good feeling the agreement between them. The old woman felt she could relax now. She continued to smile at the boy, watching the big hands with the long fingers as he pulled a dollar bill from his wallet. The old man stuffed the money into his pants pocket.

"I'll move in today," the boy said. In his smile his teeth glistened like polished pebbles. "I hope it's a quiet house."

"Quiet," echoed the man. "Very quiet. I work in the night, sleep in the day. She", indicating the woman with a jerk of his head, "make no noise. You like it here. You see. Okay?"

"Okay. We try out. I no like, I leave. Fair enough?"

The old man pumped his head up and down. "You like. You like. You see."

**A**ND LIKE THAT it was all settled. The boy moved in with a suitcase that evening, as they were having supper. He waved at them as he went by the door, and they could hear him in his room, opening and closing drawers and shaking out his clothes before hanging them in the closet.

He appeared once to ask if they had a light bulb, saying that the one in the lamp was burnt out.

She saw his arms where the flesh pushed against the shirt and the wisps of blond hair circling and curling on top of his wrists. When he caught her staring, he winked at her. "Got to have good light for all that studying I do, ha, ha." She flushed and lowered her eyes to the tablecloth.

The routine of their days quickly included him, as if the boy had always been living with them. They hardly saw him. He came in late, after she was in bed and her husband had already gone to work. She was awake when she heard the lighthearted skip of his feet on the stairs and the key turn in the door. The light went on in his room, the shoes dropped to the floor, footsteps padded to the

bathroom, the toilet flushed, and then he returned to the bedroom and closed the door. The house was silent after that. A neighbor's dog barked, the boy coughed, and she waited—for what? She could not fall asleep easily. The pillow felt too hard and she thought she had pains in her stomach. She tried sleeping on her side. The quilt pressed on her heavily. She tossed it back and lay thinking with her eyes open, watching the shadowy darkness, thinking about this and that, getting a strange urge to taste food she had not made in years or to smell a wagonload of hay as it started up the mountain or to feel the soft, wet flanks of a newly born calf. She had odd dreams that woke her up in the middle of the night, dreams about people long since dead, faces slowly moving upwards and away. She remembered a wooden bowl she had once when she was newly married, the grain polished by countless rubbings. She thought of fresh milk, and radishes covered with dirt, and the feel of her only necklace, the string of mother-of-pearl beads, cold against her skin. Why was she bothered by these old feelings? They had no right to disturb her sleep. Her hand reached for the space occupied by her husband. Of course he was not there. Did she expect to find him in the bed with her? But it was as if his thin body had left no imprint on the mattress, no smell, no sign that he slept there day and day, after she had arisen. She felt as empty as the space on the mattress.

In the morning, the boy came out of his room, brushed his teeth, grinned at her, and left for the university. She could hear his roadster coughing in the driveway after he started it and the high-pitched squeal of tires when it shot out into the road. His chest was as brown as his back. He had the shoulders of a woodsman, and narrow delicate hips that slid by the table as he passed. Sometimes, after he came out of the bathroom, droplets of water glistened on his chest like dew. He had no clumsy movements. He moved through her house like a deer darting from tree to tree.

She now noticed her husband more, the wrinkles on his hands, the sagging skin under his jaw, the way his eyes were constantly clouded over with some indefinite concern. His clothes hung loosely on him now. The pants bagged at the waist and the sleeves of his shirt seemed to be filled mostly with air, though his appetite remained the same. She piled potatoes on his plate and carrots cooked in the soup. When these were gone, he looked around for more.

Her appetite was not good. She spent hours staring out the front window. The air turned colder, leaves fell and coated the ledge about the barn roof. She did not go out much. She wandered about the house, pausing before chairs and the ice box as if they

had something to tell her.

The boy kept the door to his room closed, not locked, and she would venture into it, stand by the bed and look at the tangled mass of sheets and blankets. She made no attempt to straighten the bedding. She liked it that way. White pants, shoes, a straw hat, underwear, and socks were tossed haphazardly about the room, on the floor, dripping on the chair, clinging to the sides of open drawers. Some books and papers lay scattered under the bed. The towel she had given him was rolled up crumpled in a corner of the closet. The room and its disorder of scattered clothing seemed to stifle her with the smell of bodies pressed into one tight place. She touched nothing. She kept the door open in case the roadster unexpectedly returned to the driveway. She was like a child dazed by too many sweets and wanting more, ah, some more, so that there would never be an end.

She thought about her son. How long had it been since she thought of him?

One morning, years ago in that far-off land when they had a cow and the summer sky glistened from the heat, they found their son's room empty. He had left without a word, and they knew that nothing had befallen him, that nobody would be found floating face downward in the river, for he had taken two loafs of corn cake and a new cheese and most of his clothes except for the work pants which lay on the floor. He had gone: that was for sure. The man was so angry that he had a fit and fell to the ground squirming and foaming at the mouth, and she had to run for a bucket of water to dash over his head and keep the force from bursting through his brain. She dragged him to the bed and undressed him, massaging the taut, sinewy skin. Where she touched him, he felt like hot coals. She got undressed herself and lay in bed beside him, holding the yielding body to her and whispering to him in words she herself could not hear.

After three days her husband sat up and dressed and, without a word to her, went into the woods. Her heart sank when she saw his figure retreating down the path, through the alfalfa and in between the poplars. She was too afraid to say a word. All day she waited, killing a chicken and cleaning it, while she trembled with every sound that broke the air's stillness. Towards nightfall, he came back. They never spoke again of their son. He was gone from their lives.

**S**HE HAD THE NEW BOY'S NAME to say to herself. Willie. She spoke the name quietly, letting it linger on her tongue and roll about in her mouth. She was certain he would laugh if he heard her pronounce his name aloud.



The old man seemed satisfied with the new lodger. He pocketed the rent money without telling her what he did with it. The man and the boy scarcely met. Their waking and sleeping hours were completely different. On weekends Willie did not stay at the house. He left Friday night with his face cleanly shaven and the smell of spicy perfume lingering in the air about him; when he returned, it was Sunday night and blond fuzz covered his face, his eyes were sleepy and red. His clothes were rumpled. He hardly gave them a greeting, but rolled into his bedroom, closed the door. She heard nothing until the following morning.

But one weekend it was different.

On Friday evening, Willie left. He seemed happy about something, for he winked at her on the way out. She half saw the wink. She could have imagined it. Why would he want to bother with her? When she looked down at her hands, she saw age and defectiveness. The rest of her was probably like that, too. She was an old woman passing her days waiting for glimpses of the boy. Her husband never noticed her. She might as well be dead. She felt sad and lonely and longed to be somewhere where people were laughing and drinking wine.

She woke up suddenly in the middle of the night. The old man was beside her, snoring. Their only night together, Friday night, and he spent it sleeping. She had heard an automobile come in the driveway. Was it in her dream?

She waited. The darkness pressed upon her like layers of clothing. Maybe she had been dreaming after all.

Then she heard the click of the key turning in the door. It was unmistakable. She sat up tense with anticipation. A prickly feeling started at the back of her scalp. What should she do? Should she wake up her husband?

She listened, straining her ears to catch the timbre of each sound. Footsteps crossed the floor, slow, painstaking. She heard whispers, then giggling. The footsteps came nearer her door. She clutched her throat, her body tight with the strain of her listening.

The footsteps trailed away. The door to the boy's room squeaked open and then was closed. She heard nothing.

For a long time she lay awake on the bed. She could not decide whether she wanted to go to sleep or wait. What if someone needed her? Shouldn't she at least be ready? Her husband's snore mingled with the ticking of the alarm clock. Her heart beat louder. She folded her hands across her chest and waited. Everything seemed to have a rhythm: their breathing, her husband's snoring. He turned over in his sleep. He did even that without touching her. She might be another pillow, for all he cared.

She was still awake in the same restlessness when she heard

the door to the boy's room open. She listened. Nothing surprised her now. Footsteps started to creep across the living room.

In one almost simultaneous sequence, the door to the bathroom swung open, the light snapped on with a pop, and the door closed, shutting out the sudden flare of light.

Suddenly, as if the light had been a signal to her, she sat up in bed and flung back the covers. A surge of joy passed through her, as though she was drunk with happiness and did not know what she was doing. Her husband did not stir as she sat upright on the edge of the bed and waited for the final sign before she would move. Her heart beat faster and her breath kept in time.

A fire engine went by, its sirens shrieking. The sound flung her forward and propelled her out of the room. She felt nothing under her bare feet. Carpet, floor, threshold: they made no difference to her. She saw only the line of light at the bottom of the bathroom door.

Stealthily, feeling like a cunning fox, she reached out and put her hand quietly upon the bathroom doorknob. She was careful not to let it move. Her fingers tightened. She squeezed the knob and felt the coldness like a shock through her arm.

Conscious of her grin and the trembling of her body, all over, like a sickness, she turned the knob and threw open the door.

A girl was bending over the sink. The brown line in her buttocks made a deep shadow in the whiteness of her flesh.

She spun about and looked defiantly at the old woman. Her eyes were hard, like stones, and her lips curled downwards in a sneer.

Her skin was so white, it seemed to shine in the bathroom light. Her hair was brown, but looked darker, because of the skin. The hair tumbled over her shoulders and stopped above her breasts, the color repeated in the brown circles of her nipples. Her belly was smooth, not a wrinkle, and the navel did not seem to pierce it, only lay like an ornament on top of the skin. The legs could have been carved out of wood, so polished and slender they appeared.

The woman sucked in her breath and stared. She could not move. Her hand remained frozen to the doorknob.

"Oh jeepers creepers!" cried the girl, seeing the old woman's openmouthed stare.

She gave her wet hands one final fling over the basin and hurried out of the bathroom past the old woman. The wind of her passing made a breeze like the wings of butterflies lightly touching her before vanishing forever from sight.

She heard the boy's door close. She waited, unable to understand the vision which had appeared before her. She had been

struck dumb by perfection. She did not know what to do with the memory which remained fastened to her brain.

Water dripped in the basin. She tightened the faucet. A murmur of scent hung in the room. When she turned off the light, she felt she could see the girl's white form glowing in the darkness like moonlight.

**S**HE WAITED in bed. The sounds she expected to hear came in the order she had anticipated. The opening of the boy's door. The steps on tiptoe past her door and across the living room. The front door opening. Footsteps on the stairs. The motor starting. The grind of wheels in the driveway. The automobile moving into the street and screeching up the road.

Stillness. The clock ticked. Her husband took a deep, snuffling snore.

To her surprise, he opened his eyes suddenly and, in the leaden glow of the streetlight, he saw her sitting up in bed.

"What's the matter?" he grunted sleepily. "What are you doing up? Anything wrong?"

She shook her head. He could not see her face in the dark, so she said, evenly so he could hear her,

"No. It's nothing."

She slid slowly down under the covers. Her husband grunted again. He turned over, and then, in a few moments, he was fast asleep once more. The snoring resumed, little regularly spaced snorts and groans.

She felt a lovely warmth spreading through her. A soft, gentle smile slowly opened on her face, like a flower in the morning. She felt each muscle in her body relax one after the other, as if there was some kind of force kneading out the heaviness in her limbs. She was light, full of air, a leaf picked up by a gust and twirled towards the sky. Higher and higher she flew. Her body had no weight. She was by herself in the air, soaring above the earth and seeing everything in once glance that no one else had ever known.

Her eyes fluttered, closed. A great, peaceful weariness came over her and she settled into sleep, a deep dreamless sleep, as she had not slept for a long time.

# Memories Fire Clouds

*for my father*

KARL PATTEN

Lying in a drawer somewhere  
Are the three goat's horns  
You wore on your sleeve,  
The mad artillery in the distance  
And tourniquets mattering now.

Field hospitals. Clouds tight with rain,  
Tents teetered up over shrapnel-gashes  
And peelings from the mustard.

Or behind the lines the convent,  
The nuns skewing their eyes  
Away from the mump-swollen balls  
Of a dozen racked doughboys.

Mud, the truck stuck on iron wheels,  
Pushing, pushing, the horses  
With feathered ankles finally  
Sucking it out, the Southerner  
Stretched on the backboards  
Sobbing for his Bible.

*These memories of yours beat in my mind  
Sixty years later—sixty years!  
Why must I remember long before I was born?*

Because I've learned to respect  
The strength of fire, a pure brother  
Of many forms, many ways. I fear  
That brother who seems to destroy  
And love the sinews of his shapes.

Because I saw lightning  
Scribbling God's initials  
In a tumble of clouds, a chaos,  
Six miles over Kansas



As I jetted to visit you  
In your piecemeal dying, white now on white.

Because there are no causes.  
Only words and acts.

And yet because my love for you  
Is not in mothballs—  
We've had a long touching.

## Instinct

*for my uncle*

MICHAEL WATERS

I love the way dogs prepare to sleep  
by smoothing the imaginary grasses,  
easing into a circle.  
Instinct is wonderful. But even dogs  
are not always protected  
and sometimes stiffen by morning.  
He was an old dog. And often  
older relatives startle themselves  
in the morning in the mirror

although the thumb-print of ash  
is invisible. But I believe them  
because years ago my uncle,  
the monument-maker,  
rose one slate-gray morning  
and, clutching his chisel,  
engraved his name on the cheapest marker  
before returning to his bed  
to die.

## Variations on a Logger Stalked by a Cougar

RON McFARLAND

Cougar steps from a stand of tamarack  
and in his eyes red flannel  
dances to a foreign tune.  
No subtlety in this human song,  
no long winters spent in drifts  
or deep in caves or cliffs,  
yet some enchantment of this tired  
whistling draws him on  
and closer to the unfamiliar smell.

At any moment man could turn,  
behind him find the cougar  
step for step and face  
confronting unfamiliar face.  
Then would his music end,  
or would he know to bend his tune  
around the tendons  
stretched and nervous,  
taut as a well-rehearsed sonata?

In an instant man could raise a gun  
or step once backwards, run, his whistle  
dying in the corridor of cougar's ear  
Or in an instant fear  
might wrap his ankles,  
share his lips, devour note by note  
his tired throat,  
leaving only scraps of shirt,  
some bones, the resonance, the intervals.

# On Reading Einstein

WALTER G. CREED

IN 1927 WYNDHAM LEWIS launched a sustained attack on "time" philosophers and those who had come under their spell.<sup>1</sup> Lewis's primary targets were Henri Bergson and his most conspicuous disciples—Proust, Joyce, and Gertrude Stein; but he also attacked Albert Einstein, whose offense, as Lewis saw it, was to give new life and added respectability to Bergson's ideas.

But Lewis seemed to have read little or nothing by Einstein himself before damning him. Perhaps he, like many today, considered Einstein abstruse in the extreme, inaccessible to anyone without advanced training in mathematics and theoretical physics. And comparatively little of Einstein's work had been published in England at the time Lewis wrote. Nevertheless, he had available to him a small book by Einstein, *Relativity*, which explains both the special and the general theories and the Minkowski space-time continuum in simple language and everyday terms.<sup>2</sup> While not bedtime reading, admittedly, this book is accessible to any reasonably educated person willing to work through it. But Lewis shunned this book *by* Einstein, and turned instead to a book *about* Einstein, Alexander Moszkowski's *Conversations with Einstein*, which misconstrues some of Einstein's ideas.<sup>3</sup> One wonders how Lewis then had the temerity to characterize those ideas so confidently.

Lewis was only one (and not even the first) of a long line of critics to get most or all of their information about Einstein from secondary sources or even hearsay. Such critics have turned to popularizers of Einstein's work, to books by James Jeans, Alfred North Whitehead, Arthur Eddington, Bertrand Russell, and others which often distort Einstein's work.

In 1930 John Crowe Ransom attacked Jeans's highly personal, idiosyncratic version of the space-time continuum and the god Jeans found lurking in its shadows, without troubling to find out what Einstein himself had to say about the continuum.<sup>4</sup> Two decades later Lawrence Durrell, preparing a lecture on "Space Time and Poetry," turned to the work of Russell, Jeans, the critic H. V. Routh (who got

his information at second-hand, too), and even Wyndham Lewis, but not—or not principally—to the work of Einstein, whom he quotes only once and very briefly.<sup>5</sup> Nor, apparently, did Durrell go beyond these sources when he wrote *The Alexandria Quartet*, a work he claimed was based in form and content on “the relativity proposition.”<sup>6</sup> Two decades after Durrell’s lecture, Sharon Spencer in *Space, Time and Structure in the Modern Novel* proposes to discuss the effect of Einstein and the “‘new physics of relativity’” on fiction.<sup>7</sup> But she never cites one work by Einstein; she relies instead on secondary sources, like Ortega Y Gasset’s 1920s essays on relativity and Siegfried Giedion’s *Space, Time and Architecture*. More recently, David Bleich, attempting to build a case for what he calls the “subjective paradigm” as the dominant mode of thought in several disciplines today, claims Einstein as one of the originators of this mode. Bleich also refers to the space of general relativity as analogous to “ethical space,” in which “the number and needs of human bodies ‘curve’ the space according to themselves.”<sup>8</sup> Bleich’s extensive citations include scientists and philosophers of science, but not Einstein. Similarly, Steven Foster’s “Relativity and *The Waste Land*: A Postulate” relies on Russell and Eddington and badly misrepresents Einstein’s theories.<sup>9</sup>

To be fair, counter-examples also exist; some critics have sought out Einstein’s work before discussing his ideas, like H. J. Muller in his essay, “Humanism in the World of Einstein”; others make no mention of their sources but seem to have grasped the ideas they bring in, like Edmund Wilson in his discussion of Proust in *Axel’s Castle*.<sup>10</sup> However, Muller and Wilson are rare critics in this field. Even today, when more and more studies are aimed at assessing Einstein’s relevance to literature and criticism, Einstein himself remains largely unread.

This neglect has had unfortunate consequences. It has led to grave distortions of the theories: for instance the mistaken belief that relativity implies or justifies some form of relativism, or that it abolished the law of causality, or that the space-time continuum is a quasi-mystical concept. It has helped sustain the myth that the theories themselves are utterly incomprehensible to ordinary mortals like writers and critics. It has fostered an image of Einstein as one who set himself apart from his fellow men, unconcerned with their affairs except on the occasion when he helped unleash the evils of atomic energy. Worst of all, neglect of his essays on the nature and methods of theoretical physics has deprived literary criticism of potentially valuable models.

I cannot undo a wrong six decades in the making, but I can recommend that the centennial of Einstein’s birth be taken as the



occasion for bringing his work to the attention of writers and critics. Einstein's technical works *do* require sustained attention and a willingness to truly wrestle with ideas, yet they pose fewer difficulties and try one's patience less than the deliberate obscurantism of some recent critics; his philosophical essays (and especially his occasional essays) offer no real difficulty to the serious reader. On whatever subject and at whatever level he was writing, Einstein endeavored to present his ideas clearly and succinctly, without distorting them. I believe he succeeded.

**E**INSTEIN'S WORK falls into three broad categories: technical, philosophical, and occasional essays.

The technical works include the papers in which he set forth his many theories, from the famous first paper on relativity, published in 1905, "On the Electrodynamics of Moving Bodies," to papers on the mass-energy equivalence, general relativity, cosmology, quantum physics, and molecular motion. Translations of the most important papers on relativity and cosmology, dating from 1905 to 1919, are contained in *The Principle of Relativity*, which includes related papers by other physicists, the most interesting of which is Hermann Minkowski's on the space-time continuum (which originated with him), "Space and Time."<sup>11</sup> This category also includes Einstein's commentaries and elaborations on his theories, the most extended of which is *The Meaning of Relativity*.<sup>12</sup> Several essays in the omnibus volume, *Ideas and Opinions*,<sup>13</sup> complement the predominantly mathematical discussions in *The Meaning of Relativity*. Einstein's retrospective look at the theories of relativity (and other theories, most notably those of quantum physics), in his "Autobiographical Notes," and his "Reply to Criticisms," form the alpha and the omega of the indispensable *Albert Einstein: Philosopher-Scientist*.<sup>14</sup> Between Einstein's contributions to this volume are critical essays by 25 physicists and philosophers, several of which remain unsurpassed. Finally, there are the non-technical or "popular" expositions of the theories, which are probably the best place for the non-scientist to begin. Einstein's own *Relativity* (updated as late as 1952) is the basic text, but there is also *The Evolution of Physics*,<sup>15</sup> written in collaboration with one of his assistants.

Well-chosen secondary works can be helpful, even necessary. (I am not against secondary works. I only object when they are consulted to the exclusion of what Einstein himself wrote.) As one would expect, they are legion. Most of the early popular expositions of the theory, like Jeans's *The Mysterious Universe* or Russell's *The ABC of Relativity*, are to be avoided unless one is interested in Jeans

or Russell rather than Einstein. There is one early classic which is still valid and valuable today, however: Max Born's *Einstein's Theory of Relativity*, first published in 1920 and updated in 1962.<sup>16</sup> P. W. Bridgman's accurately titled *A Sophisticate's Primer of Relativity*<sup>17</sup> concerns itself only with the special theory, but it dispels many of the misconceptions that have grown up around it. Max Jammer's *Concepts of Space*<sup>18</sup> provides the historical background, from the Greeks to Kant and Poincaré, from which Einstein's space-time and "curved" space-time emerged as radically new concepts. Milič Čapek's compilation of essays, *The Concepts of Space and Time*,<sup>19</sup> supplements Jammer's study on space and contributes to a deeper understanding of Einsteinian and other concepts of time. J.J. Callahan's article, "The Curvature of Space in a Finite Universe,"<sup>20</sup> makes effective use of illustrations (including an Escher lithograph) to help conceptualize four-dimensional space and the finite but unbounded universe of Einsteinian cosmology.

These works—especially those by Einstein—should be required reading for anyone who wants to consider the relation of poetry or fiction or drama to some aspect of the theories. Parallels of various sorts exist between the theories and works of literature—the opening lines of Eliot's "Burnt Norton" succinctly describe one way of conceiving of time in the space-time continuum, for instance; but most alleged relativity-literature parallels offered to us over the past sixty years trivialize the theories if not the works of literature themselves and obscure deeper, more truly poetic parallels. If everyone interested in Einstein's theories were required to go through Einstein's works carefully before putting pen to paper, we would have from the few who persisted imaginative and critical studies of far greater interest and significance than we have seen so far.

EINSTEIN'S PHILOSOPHY, especially of science, offers its own rewards. Most of the essays in this second category are in part V of *Ideas and Opinions*, "Contributions to Science" (some of which I have already cited); but a few essays in the first parts of the book are relevant.<sup>21</sup> His "Autobiographical Notes" and "Reply to Criticisms" in *Albert Einstein: Philosopher-Scientist* also belong here. As for secondary works, all but one or two strictly technical essays in that collection at least touch on his philosophy of science. Beyond that, the number of studies and commentaries is again vast, and I will mention only two, which take quite different approaches. The six essays on relativity in Gerald Holton's *Thematic Origins of Scientific Thought, Kepler to Einstein*<sup>22</sup> discuss the intellectual backgrounds and philosophical orientation of the theories, and they

read like good literary criticism. None of the essays in Karl Popper's *Conjectures and Refutations*<sup>23</sup> is specifically about Einstein, but many of them bear the stamp of his influence. As Popper once said, "what I have done is mainly to make explicit certain points which are implicit in the work of Einstein."<sup>24</sup>

Einstein was concerned with many of the same methodological and epistemological problems literary critics come up against in their work, and he was able to get at the heart of these problems and propose compelling solutions to them.

Discussing the rudiments of linguistic theory, William Moulton writes that this discipline shares with the natural sciences "the method of observation, classification, and generalization, and the search for countable units and describable structures."<sup>25</sup> The implication here is that the scientist first observes the phenomena he is concerned with, then begins tentatively to classify them; and that after long acquaintance with the phenomena, generalizations will suggest themselves which can be modified by further study and experimentation into the laws which govern the phenomena. Leon Edel implies a similar process (though without referring to scientific method) when he writes that "The biographer may be as imaginative as he pleases—the more imaginative the better—in the way in which he brings together his materials, *but he must not imagine the materials.*"<sup>26</sup> In biography as in linguistics and in science, the "imaginative" work—the hypothesis that draws everything together and explains it—is assumed to come after painstaking empirical work, long hours of staring into a microscope or examining speech patterns or sifting through documents and letters.

But scientists no longer work this way (if they ever did), according to Einstein. The inductive method, which Moulton implicitly describes and Edel hints at, Einstein believed to be in error. For him the imaginative work comes *first*, not last. Prompted by familiarity with phenomena, one tries to find an explanation for them and the problems they pose, not by methodical examination of the phenomena but by "free invention." Then the empirical work begins in earnest, as one tests this explanation or hypothesis against the evidence. More often than not, the hypothesis will prove wrong and a new one will have to be sought; and not infrequently, as Einstein well knew from his "years of anxious searching in the dark" for a valid general theory of relativity, the process will have to be repeated many times.

What this implies for criticism (and linguistics and literary biography and almost every discipline) is that laws or general principles or interpretations cannot be derived from a set of facts by an inductive process (or even through an "inductive leap"); that

instead we *begin* with a premise or hypothesis, sometimes in the form of an unrecognized prejudice, which we impose on the facts. We cannot do otherwise. Einstein expressed this idea succinctly at the end of a tribute to Kepler: "It seems that the human mind has first to construct forms independently before we can find them in things . . . knowledge cannot spring from experience alone but only from the comparison of the inventions of the intellect with observed fact" (*Ideas and Opinions*, p. 266). To be unaware of this is to ignore hidden assumptions, to believe one is deferring to the evidence while deferring instead to prejudice. It may also mean remaining unaware that the real work of science or criticism, "the comparison of the inventions of the intellect with observed fact," can only begin after the hypothesis or assumption or even prejudice has been clearly formulated; *and* that comparison is an indispensable phase of all intellectually honest work, even if it sometimes means giving up an interpretation that seems absolutely right. As Einstein said of our ideas about physical reality, since they are speculative in origin, "We must always be ready to change [them] . . . in order to do justice to perceived facts in the most perfect way logically" (*Ideas and Opinions*, p. 266).

**B**UT SOME THINKERS have taken this methodology far beyond what Einstein envisioned. For instance, Jacques Derrida, the foremost philosopher of structuralism, recognizes as Einstein did that one does not work inductively toward an interpretation but begins by postulating some meaning or structure, which he refers to as the "center." The justification for postulating one meaning or structure rather than another seems to lie in the critic's perception of the work as it was originally conceived or intended by its author.

But for Derrida this "center" can only be imagined and never known; it is always arbitrary. It provides the starting-point and the framework for an interpretation, but it cannot justify that interpretation. Moreover, it imposes limits, permitting some statements and prohibiting others (presumably in deference to the principles of logical consistency and coherence). For this reason, no interpretation of a text can be considered as derived from any ultimate authority, either that of the author or of his *milieu* or even (as the new critics presumed) of the text itself; and thus interpretation becomes potentially an infinite process. One arbitrarily postulates a center, works out all of its implications, then abandons it for a new one, just as arbitrary as and neither more nor less valid than the first; and so on. This kind of interpretation, as opposed to the "sad, negative, nostalgic, guilty, Rousseauesque" interpretation that



looks for the lost center, represents "the Nietzschean *affirmation*—the joyous affirmation of the play of the world and of the innocence of becoming, the affirmation of a world of signs without error, without truth, without origin, offered to an active interpretation."<sup>27</sup>

Derrida extends his theory of interpretation far beyond the realm of literature, into the "human sciences" and even the physical sciences. He intends it to have far-reaching consequences, to become the epistemology of our era.

In a perceptive response to Derrida, Jean Hyppolite asked what relation the Einsteinian "constant"—the "combination of space-time, which does not belong to any of the experimenters who live the experience, but which, in a way, dominates the whole construct"—had to Derrida's "center." Derrida confidently replied that "the Einsteinian constant is not a constant, is not a center. It is the very concept of variability—it is, finally, the concept of the game. In other words, it is not the concept of *something*—of a center starting from which an observer could master the field—but the very concept of the game which . . . I was trying to elaborate."<sup>28</sup>

Derrida is simply wrong about Einstein. True, Einstein used the idea of a game in discussing epistemology. There is no pre-determined method for postulating the concepts with which we order our sense impressions and thus our world, he maintained; "All that is necessary is to fix a set of rules, since without such rules the acquisition of knowledge in the desired sense would be impossible. One may compare these rules with the rules of a game in which, while the rules themselves are arbitrary, it is their rigidity alone which makes the game possible" (*Ideas and Opinions*, p. 292). But Einstein intended *his* game to be played with a special goal in mind: empirical success. Moreover, although there is a generous element of the arbitrary in his description, his game is not played with ever-shifting rules. It can never lead to definitive results, but properly played it can take us ever closer to the ideal of describing the world as it is and not simply as we imagine it. Concepts generated in playing this game must always be referred back to sense impressions, to our experience of the world, and they must meet rigorous formal criteria. Translated into the terms of literary criticism, Einstein's game would continually take one back to the text, its author, and his *milieu*—to the very things Derrida banishes from consideration.

In the same essay, Einstein makes a further remark about the "liberty of choice" in postulating concepts and their relationship:

The liberty of choice, however, is of a special kind; it is not in any way similar to the liberty of a writer of fiction. Rather, it is similar to that of a man engaged in solving a well-designed word puzzle. He may, it is true, propose any word as the solution; but there is only *one* word which really solves the

puzzle in all its parts. It is a matter of faith that nature—as she is perceptible to our five senses—takes the character of such a well-formulated puzzle. The successes reaped up to now by science do, it is true, give a certain encouragement for this faith. (*Ideas and Opinions*, pp. 294-95).

The “matter of faith” Einstein here affirms rather mildly, he elsewhere proclaims more boldly. “Certain it is that a conviction, akin to religious feeling, of the rationality or intelligibility of the world lies behind all scientific work of a higher order” (*Ideas and Opinions*, p. 262).

Transferred to criticism, *this* game-theory suggests that some sort of “center” or meaning of a text *exists* and that the task of criticism is to seek it. If one wants to bring in special relativity (as Hyppolite and Derrida have), this “center” corresponds not to the center of the Ptolemaic or even Copernican cosmos but to the center of the space-time continuum, the absolute vantage-point which potentially exists everywhere, accessible through the mathematics of Minkowski, and from which one *can* (to turn Derrida’s statement upside-down) “master the field.” The center of the space-time continuum is more akin to that of the sphere Borges describes in an essay on Pascal: “that intellectual sphere, whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere and which we call God.”<sup>29</sup> Put in other terms, interpretation is a process that begins with the postulation of a meaning or structure, as Derrida says. But in working out the details of an interpretation and subjecting them to some criteria of validity (and of course to discussion and criticism), we may find the postulated center inadequate or wrong, and have to try a new one. Derrida says we must shift from one postulated center to another because no real center exists, and the fun in his game lies in trying out as many centers as possible. Einstein says we must shift from one postulate to a new one when we learn that the old one is inadequate to the facts, since our aim is “to do justice to the perceived facts,” and the joy in his game lies in approaching the truth—though never in reaching it.

I do not want to suggest that if we follow Einstein’s lead we assume the meaning of a poem or other work is univocal or unambiguous. It may be multifoliate. We *do* assume it exists and is not just a fiction, created by the whim of the interpreter, to be destroyed with his next breath as he creates a new center. And although we may never discover the true center of a text, we can devise ways of determining when we are moving closer to it. Examples are at hand in much of the better traditional criticism, and details of programs can be gleaned in the work of critics like E.D. Hirsch, Jr. and even some structuralists (not Derrida), when they leave off metatheorizing and talk about real texts and the rules which can be seen governing them.<sup>30</sup>

THE THIRD CATEGORY of Einstein's work offers less intellectual excitement than the other two, but it encompasses a wide range of topics. In the first four sections of *Ideas and Opinions* are essays on war and militarism, pacifism and disarmament, on Germany and the United States, on anti-semitism and the Arabs and Jews, on teaching and education, and on religion (Einstein advocated a sophisticated pantheism integral with his physics and philosophy of science). Most of the essays are brief; brevity is characteristic of just about everything Einstein wrote. But they show his deep concern with most of the major issues of our time.

Einstein did not set out to be a man of worldly affairs. By choice he would have spent his life absorbed in his work, shutting out every outside disturbance. With powers of concentration far above the average, he was able to devote his full attention to scientific problems whenever he had time to himself, even during periods of grave crisis. But events determined not only that he would rise to the top of his profession, honored in 1914 with an appointment to the prestigious Kaiser Wilhelm Institute in Berlin (now the Max Planck Institute); but that in 1919 he would ascend to world fame when his theory that light rays are bent by strong gravitational fields was confirmed during a solar eclipse. Einstein had caught everyone's imagination with the success of his daring theory; and stepping into the spotlight, he found that it followed him everywhere, from Berlin to America and Japan and back to Germany, then to America again, a refugee from the Nazi government he boldly denounced in the international press.

Any account of Einstein's life therefore reads in part like a history of the first half of the twentieth century, with none of the important events missing—World War I, the revolution in Germany after the war, the Versailles Treaty and its discontents, the League of Nations and its failure, the Nazi take-over of Germany, World War II and the atomic bomb, the Cold War and the threat of nuclear holocaust. Einstein was involved, directly or indirectly, in all of them, at once the advocate for human dignity and one of its supreme examples. Even at the height of his fame he never lost his humility, his touch with others, particularly younger scientists beginning their careers. Quiet courage, against the Kaiser, the Nazis, and even McCarthyism, was natural to him. No work focuses so sharply on Einstein the public figure as does the careful compilation of his letters, speeches, and other documents, woven together with appropriate commentary, *Einstein on Peace*.<sup>31</sup> World War I made Einstein a pacifist; the Nazi regime led him to propose, along with other scientists aware that the Germans were



most likely working toward the same goal, the development of the atomic bomb; Hiroshima turned him into an advocate of disarmament and world government.

The greater part of Einstein's correspondence remains unavailable in English. Aside from *Einstein on Peace*, there are only *The Born-Einstein Letters* (see note 3)—well worth reading even though many letters are devoted to technical questions—and a brief exchange of strictly technical letters on wave mechanics with Max Planck and Erwin Schrodinger. Letters to three other colleagues have been published, two in French, one in German.<sup>32</sup> A physicist and the editor of Princeton University Press are now cataloging Einstein's papers at The Institute for Advanced Study, and eventually they will make all of his work available for publication, but I am told it may be years before this happens. In the meantime there are the biographies and related studies, again numerous. In his *Conversations with Einstein* Moszkowski, as I said earlier, sometimes misrepresents Einstein's ideas, but for anyone familiar with Einstein's work the book is valuable. Philipp Frank, himself a well-known physicist and philosopher of science, seven years before Einstein's death wrote what is still considered the indispensable if not the standard biography.<sup>33</sup> More recently, Ronald Clark produced the longest and most-heavily documented biography, full of useful references and containing a long bibliography.<sup>34</sup> Jeremy Bernstein's *New Yorker* "Profile" on Einstein was subsequently edited into a book.<sup>35</sup> A physicist as well as a regular contributor to *The New Yorker*, Bernstein successfully weaves intelligent and intelligible discussions of the theories into a sympathetic portrait of the man.

Significantly, Einstein's "Autobiographical Notes" provides almost no details of his personal life, concentrating instead on the development of his ideas. Reticence can account in part for this omission, but the prime motive was his belief that "The essential [thing] in the being of a man of my type lies precisely in *what* he thinks and *how* he thinks, not in what he does or suffers" (*Albert Einstein: Philosopher-Scientist*, p. 33). This principle goes back at least 30 years before the "Notes," to an address given in honor of Max Planck's sixtieth birthday, when he said that "A finely tempered nature longs to escape from personal life into the world of objective perception and thought" and avoid "the narrow whirlpool of personal experience" (*Ideas and Opinions*, p. 225). For Einstein a man's ideas were virtually everything, the details of his life almost nothing. Hungry as most of us are for the latter, we should devote most of our attention to the former not so much because he wanted it that way as because in his *ideas* lies the real excitement of reading



Einstein. The reader will certainly profit from exposing himself to those ideas.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Time and Western Man* (London, 1927; rpt. Boston: Beacon Press, 1957).

<sup>2</sup> *Relativity: The Special and the General Theory: A Popular Exposition*, trans. Robert Lawson (London, 1920; rpt. New York: Crown, 1961).

<sup>3</sup> Trans. Henry Brose (London, 1921; rept. New York: Horizon Press, 1972). Einstein was not pleased with this book and, urged by friends, tried to prohibit its publication: see *The Born-Einstein Letters*, trans. Irene Born (New York: Walker, 1971), pp. 37-43.

<sup>4</sup> *God without Thunder* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1930); see ch. 12, "God as a Mathematician."

<sup>5</sup> See *A Key to Modern British Poetry* (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1952), ch. 2.

<sup>6</sup> "Note" to *Balthazar* (New York: Dutton, 1958), unnumbered p. 5; see my *The Muse of Science and "The Alexandria Quartet"* (Norwood, Pa.: Norwood Editions, 1977), ch. 1.

<sup>7</sup> (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1971), p. xvii.

<sup>8</sup> "The Subjective Paradigm in Science, Psychology, and Criticism," *New Literary History*, 7 (1976), 313 and 325.

<sup>9</sup> *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 7 (1965), 86-88.

<sup>10</sup> "Humanism in the World of Einstein," *The Southern Review*, 5 (1939), 121-140; *Axel's Castle* (1931; rpt. New York: Scribner's n.d.), pp. 161-62.

<sup>11</sup> H.A. Lorentz, A. Einstein, H. Minkowski, and H. Weyl, *The Principle of Relativity: A Collection of Original Memoirs on the Special and General Theory of Relativity*, trans. W. Perrett and G.B. Jeffery (London, 1923; rpt. New York: Dover, n.d.).

<sup>12</sup> 5th edn. (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1956)

<sup>13</sup> New York: Crown, 1954. This book, which reprints all but a handful of the essays in the earlier collections, *The World as I See It* (New York: Covici-Friede, 1934) and *Out of My Later Years* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1950), was recently reissued (New York: Dell, 1973). The most helpful essays are "What Is the Theory of Relativity?" "Geometry and Experience," "On the Theory of Relativity," "The Mechanics of Newton," "The Problem of Space, Ether, and the Field in Physics," "Notes on the Origin of the General Theory of Relativity," "Physics and Reality," " $E = MC^2$ ," and "On the Generalized Theory of Gravitation."

<sup>14</sup> Ed. Paul A. Schilpp (Evanston, Ill.: Library of Living Philosophers, 1949; rpt. LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court, 1973).

<sup>15</sup> Albert Einstein and Leopold Infeld, *The Evolution of Physics* (1938; rpt. New York: Simon and Schuster, n.d.).

<sup>16</sup> Rev. edn. (New York: Dover, 1962).

- <sup>17</sup> (Middletown, Ct., 1962, rpt. New York: Harper & Row, 1965).
- <sup>18</sup> Foreword by Albert Einstein (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1954).
- <sup>19</sup> (Dordrecht and Boston: D. Reidel, 1976).
- <sup>20</sup> *Scientific American*, 235, no. 2 (Aug. 1976), 90-100.
- <sup>21</sup> E.g., "Bertrand Russell's Theory of Knowledge," "A Mathematician's Mind," "Science and Religion," and "Religion and Science: Irreconcilable?"
- <sup>22</sup> (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1973), pp. 165-380.
- <sup>23</sup> (1962; rpt. New York: Torchbook-Harper & Row, 1968; see the index of names for specific references to Einstein.)
- <sup>24</sup> *Einstein: The Man and His Achievement*, ed. G.J. Whitrow (London, 1967; rept. New York: Dover, 1973), p. 23.
- <sup>25</sup> "Linguistics," in *The Aims and Methods of Scholarship in Modern Languages and Literatures*, ed. James Thorpe, 2nd edn. (New York: M.L.A., 1970), p. 1.
- <sup>26</sup> *Literary Biography* (London, 1957; rpt. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1973), p. 1; Edel's italics.
- <sup>27</sup> "La Structure, le signe et le jeu dans le discours des sciences humaines," in *L'Écriture et la différence* (Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1967), p. 427. This essay was originally read at a colloquium at Johns Hopkins in 1966; see the next note for a translation and abbreviation of that version.
- <sup>28</sup> *The Structuralist Controversy*, ed. and trans. Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato (1970; rpt. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1972), pp. 266, 267.
- <sup>29</sup> "The Fearful Sphere of Pascal," trans. Anthony Kerrigan, in *Labyrinths*, ed. Donald Yates and James Irby (New York: New Directions, 1964), p. 190.
- <sup>30</sup> See ch. 11 of Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1975), for an excellent discussion of structuralism as the study of "rule-governed processes" vs. structuralism as infinite "free play."
- <sup>31</sup> Ed. Otto Nathan and Heniz Norden (1960; rpt. New York, Schocken, 1968).
- <sup>32</sup> *Lettres à Maurice Solovine* (Paris: Gauthier-Villars, 1956); Albert Einstein and Arnold Sommerfeld, *Briefwechsel*, ed. Armin Hermann (Basel and Stuttgart: Schwabe, 1968); *Albert Einstein-Michele Besso Correspondence, 1903-1955*, ed. P. Speziali (Paris: Hermann, 1972). Several interesting letters are included in *Einstein: A Centenary Volume*, ed. A.P. French (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1979), a book which otherwise contains no new material by Einstein but does include brief reminiscences by 18 persons who knew him. The book's 13 critical essays vary considerably in quality and freshness.
- <sup>33</sup> *Einstein: His Life and Times*, trans. George Rosen (New York: Knopf, 1947).
- <sup>34</sup> *Einstein: The Life and Times* (Cleveland: World, 1971).
- <sup>35</sup> *Einstein* (New York: Viking, 1973).



## Contributors

**W**ALTER CREED has been studying the relationship between literature and science for over fifteen years; he's preparing a book on the subject as he pursues his teaching career in the English Department at the University of Hawaii. A graduate student at the University of Missouri, PRESTON FILBERT studied writing with John Gilgun, a name our readers will recognize. RON McFARLAND is a devotee of hunting (birds), fishing, and soccer; he recently edited *Eight Idaho Poets* at the University of Idaho, where he teaches. MARYANN MENDOZA was recently graduated from La Salle with a degree in English. Co-editor of Bucknell University's *West Branch*, KARL PATTEN has published poems in numerous journals. ARNOLD SABLE, a native of Boston, lives in Kibbutz Kabri in West Galilee, Israel. He's been a librarian and writes plays and music in addition to fiction. Having spent her summer at Yaddo, NANINE VALEN is on her way to Bali. Last spring she won an award for her children's book, *The Devil's Tail* (Scribner). Frequent contributor MICHAEL WATERS has a new book of poems coming out any day entitled *Not Just Any Death* (BOA).

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